

and hard work is able to get along. It is a solution that could only work for one lineman out of a thousand, and Mr. Haines knows it.

It is not merely the lame ending, however, that indicates what a revolutionary attitude might have given Mr. Haines. That is merely a symptom of a lack of understanding of forces that are as much a part of linemen's lives and as much a menace to those lives as the voltages that pass through their wires. Without that understanding, *Slim* tells only half the story, but it tells that half effectively, and it suggests that our revolutionary writers would do well to remember the freshness, the drama, and the human value of work as well as the causes and the necessity of revolt. It also suggests that even a fifty-fifty proletarian has an edge these days on the average bourgeois.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

The Frightened Physicists

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE UNIVERSE, by W. F. G. Swann. Macmillan. \$3.75.

When, as to our only resource, we turn to such a work as this for the contemporary explanation of the inscrutable universe, we are deceived beyond all endurance. The deception practised by those experts in pure physics who have written similar works is so unanimous, and so consistently of the same kind, that there is good reason to wonder whether the scientific method is not an even shoddier delusion than any of its predecessors, than any of the phantasies reared in the infancy of the race. Such pessimism, however, can not be sincerely sustained, for the results of the scientific method are too many, too real, too revolutionary, and too fruitful. We are obliged, in the face of such antitheses, to seek the reason for our deception at the hands of science's priestcraft in the persons of the priests themselves. And there, indeed, the reason awaits.

The deliberate and miserable deception which Swann, Eddington, Millikan, Compton, and almost all other genuinely gifted physicists, promote, lies in their bending of the so-called new physics to buttress, nay, to justify, infantilisms like god, and immortality, and free will. In such theological and philosophical realms, one is entitled to assume, the scientist should be mute, if not disdainful. That is not the case. Instead, with an eagerness similar to desperation, they explain our new knowledge in terms of the old. It is no longer possible to believe them to be innocent actors in such a travesty, and it is time, it is imperative, that their motives be laid bare. It is no longer possible to believe they are innocent victims of the so-called time lag, that disgusting interval which, in the past, has separated the discovery of new truth from its application. There are, it is true, some ameliorating, human, considerations, and of these I will take notice later. But that crime is too great, too dangerous, to be condoned by sympathy for human frailty. Their crime is loss of courage, and from this cowardice comes intellectual dishonesty.

Let us consider this Swann, this Englishman who has been the chief of the physics division of the Carnegie Institution's department of terrestrial magnetism, who has been professor of physics at Yale and the University of Chicago, and who, since 1927, has been the director of the Bartol Research Foundation of the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia, where only the most advanced problems of theoretical and mathematical physics are considered.

His book is designed to inform the laity of how the universe seems to one who understands the general and special relativity theories and the theories of quanta and other atomic hypotheses. The purpose is important, his method of illustration is trivial and unsatisfactory. This can be excused, but what cannot be forgiven are such statements as this: "Death would constitute, as it were, the master discontinuity or group of discontinuities, following which the history of the organism would go on according to the ordinary continuous laws of physics without the occurrence of any further discontinuities of the kind under discussion. Mathematical physics," he explains, "presents no fundamental obstacle to going to heaven."

The discontinuities to which he alludes are sudden, inexplicable breaks in the chain of cause and effect. Planck, discoverer of the great theory of quanta, explicitly warned against assuming that, because atomic behavior seems at present in certain phases to be discontinuous, everything in the universe is haphazard. Planck was aware that what seems discontinuous may later prove to be controlled by factors now imperceptible to the human senses. But the majority of pure physicists have not been deterred. Marching behind Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, which itself should be confined to atomic behavior, or rather to the current hypotheses of atomic behavior, they have engaged in a field day of probabilities, and have refurbished old animistic and vitalistic philosophies ad lib. Swann is actually led to declare that cancer may be caused by the sudden advent of discontinuity into the cellular processes, by a visitation, as it were, not of the devil, but of what the vitalists call "new initial conditions."

Let us turn from such drivel to a consideration of the truly great and revolutionary generalization which is the valid and permanent contribution of the so-called new (mathematical) physics. It is an epistemological conception that promises a greater approximation to reality than man has ever achieved. It involves a complete reorientation of the ways in which we regard the behavior of matter, living and inert, of the ways in which we think about "events" throughout the universe. This, indeed, is the hypothesis with which pure physicists should be concerned when they forsake experimentation for explanation. And the very thing from which they now shy away.

To the query, "What is reality?" philosophy has always answered, "It depends on the point of view of the observer." This has been no mere evasion. It has been a legitimate ex-

pression of a truth. Like all honesties it contains an intimation of the way out of the dilemma. The real import of the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics provides the solution of this dilemma.

The behavior (and hence some of the nature) of matter is more accurately perceived not by the individual man, or any collection of men, but by interrelationships of matter and motion, by descriptions of matter without relation to man, in a new frame of reference, in which man has no part. It involves, of course, a further elimination of anthropomorphism, of man's immemorial propensity for seeing himself, and his pathetic little purposes, in all that he witnesses, and in everything he tries to explain.

Why, in the face of the need for and inevitability of such a revolution in thinking, are our pure scientists bewildered, and, what is even worse, militantly regressive? It is because the pure scientist, like all men, fears the unfamiliar, and quails at the very prospect of forsaking man as arbiter. It is because the pure scientist sees in this new epistemology a further liquidation of the individual, fears for his own ego, and for the rugged individualists who have endowed the laboratories. It is because the pure scientist, both consciously and subconsciously, under capitalism, *desires* to support the myths by which the exploited are enslaved. It is because the pure scientist is of less importance to the contemporary world than the revolutionist and the economist. He mopes for his erstwhile preeminence in the historical perspective. He is also lonely and turns to the dupes of our ancient superstitions, whom he once despised.

It is because the pure scientist is ignorant of, when he is not hostile toward, the world changes that have followed the inventions which make internationalism and collectivism inevitable. Aware of a significant change, he does not participate, and thereby paralyzes his creativity, and piddles, like Swann, about God and immortality. It is because the pure scientist knows, even though he doesn't admit, that there is more knowledge to *assimilate* than there are minds to do it, since almost all human time and energy are consumed in the daily murder of each other which living under capitalism requires. It is because the pure scientist, the most creative of the human animals, has lost his self-confidence, for there is no mass espousal, no collective drive, no real sustenance for him under capitalism. And it is because the pure scientist knows, but will not believe, that the blight of capitalism can be wiped out in revolution, and that soon, all over the world, countless human beings will be devoting their energy to solving the mysteries of our brief life.

HENRY HART.

Can Jeffers Learn?

ROBINSON JEFFERS: THE MAN AND HIS WORK, by Lawrence C. Powell. The Primavera Press. \$3.50.

Among non-revolutionary poets there is one who, in the opinion of the reviewer, merits

the adjective great—Robinson Jeffers. Mr. Powell, who keenly but not blindly admires his poetry, has written a study of Jeffers that is sound in substance and in tone, well documented, informative, and unpedantic. It is, however, weak on the side of sociological criticism. For all its striking originality of thought and expression, Jeffers' work is recognizably a product of personal situations brought about or made possible by the social-economic structure of this period and place.

Jeffers has been the most eloquent poetic spokesman of the aloof pessimism of the educated bourgeois, variety *rentier*. He repudiates society, the ugly grinding society that has everywhere developed with industrial production, as administered for the benefit of private owners. But he has not known how to remake that society. In a letter Powell quotes, he says: "I don't think industrial civilization is worth the distortion of human nature and the meanness and loss of contact with the earth that it entails. I think your Marxist industrialized Communism . . . would be only a further step in a bad direction. It would entail less meanness but equal distortion and would rot people with more complete secur-

ity." And in a recent lyric poem he asked,

Is it so hard for men to stand by themselves,
They must hang on Marx or Christ, or mere
progress?

Obviously Jeffers understands neither the aims of Communism nor the body of rigorously based and purposeful revolutionary theory that is called, for convenience, after the name of one of its great founders. It comes with something of a shock to realize not only that he does not understand Communism but also that his own philosophy is so cramped and rigid and inadequate. Powell has done a fine job in classifying and interpreting Jeffers' ideas, and their barrenness becomes perfectly clear. One sees how a stultifying and unsocial pattern of thought can impair or cancel out even such tremendous technical ability and dramatic power as Jeffers has. That is, of course, why the more recent of his novels-in-poetry seem of no great moment.

Because he is a master and an honest poet, Jeffers illustrates the blind alley situation of the artist who has repudiated the diseased and hollow culture of the dominant class but has not found his way to the forces fighting for

the future. Such an artist remains bound by an umbilical cord to an expiring social organism. Instead of vital nourishment, his connection feeds him gall and poison.

As the conflict between classes grows more acute, looking the other way ceases to be a solution even of personal problems; in fact, it becomes impossible. That breathlessly beautiful sanctuary, Carmel-by-the-Sea, is now infested with repression and terrorism like the rest of the Pacific coast. Two hundred vigilantes are organized and armed to "keep down" radicals. The John Reed Club is threatened.

Which way will Jeffers turn? Some time ago he began a poem with these lines:

While this America settles in the mould of its
vulgarity heavily thickening to empire,
And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass,
pops and sighs out and the mass hardens. . . .

By now he must see that protest is not a mere expiring bubble in the mass, but a powerful, growing ferment among the masses—a boiling effervescence that will break the mould in struggles worthy of the pen and powers of Robinson Jeffers or any major poet.

HERBERT A. KLEIN.

Dictator for a Day

ROBERT FORSYTHE

WHEN the Four Marx Brothers appeared in London in vaudeville about five years ago they virtually threw the English into a state of torpor. Those still awake when the act ended saluted the visitors with what the British know as the bird and the Americans as the Bronx cheer. And yet when they came back to the British Isles a year later with the same gags, business and general air of depravity, but this time in a motion picture, the excitement and exultation reached such a peak that their Majesties were in danger of their lives from servants suddenly maddened with a desire to carry soup as Harpo might carry it.

What prompts me to these thoughts is the return of Harold Lloyd in his new picture *The Cat's Paw* (Fox). So far as I know Mr. Lloyd always carefully avoided personal appearances, in which he was wisely advised. What he had as an actor was the horn-rimmed glasses, an air of startled naïveté and the finest group of gag men in Hollywood. His success came from the realization that money spent for brains was well invested. On the stage he would have been a very serious case of nonentity and he realized that. It becomes apparent now even to the most alert New York screen critic, always excepting Mr. Mordaunt Hall of the New York Times.

But even so there is something about the screen which heightens both drama and humor. For one thing it is the high general com-

petence of screen productions. A poor stage play is something so embarrassing and terrible that the audience can actively suffer in its presence. Screen plays can be very bad, but you never have the feeling that you are taking part in the public humiliation of a human being who is passing for the moment as an actor. In addition movies have money enough for costumes, setting and photographic tricks and even the worst film goes along from start to finish as if it had some evil reason for wanting to exist. For this reason Mr. Lloyd is able to continue without molestation.

All through the picture I was trying to analyze the humor and suddenly it came to me. The film is made from the Saturday Evening Post serial of Clarence Budington Kelland. But before that Mr. Kelland was an editor and writer for American Boy. *The Cat's Paw* is schoolboy humor of the intellectual level of *Boots and Her Buddies*. Mr. Kelland, the great wit who is president of the Dutch Treat Club in New York, composed of other great wits, reveals his wittiness in ways so obvious that even the ushers must get screaming after two performances.

It is the story of the young American who has lived in China with his father, the missionary, from an early age. On his first trip back to this country to get a wife he runs into complications which lead to his candidacy for mayor of the city of Stockport. He has only been in town two days, but the laws of

voting and office holding are very flexible in the Saturday Evening Post and Stockport for here is Ezekiel Cobb (a typical yokel humor name of the Kelland type) mayor of the city against his will. He wants to quit, but there is a girl of course and what does she do? The originality of all this will murder you. She taunts him. Yes, she taunts him with words about cowardice and he stays and he fights the corrupt politicians. Finally they frame him in a highly unique fashion. He finds a woman in his rooms being strangled by a rough-looking person, who runs at our hero's approach. The lady begs him to protect these valuable papers which the bad man has been trying to seize. Will Ezekiel put them in his safety deposit box? Ezekiel does and they are found there (being stock in various concerns wanting franchises) and he is ruined. But before he is ruined he has twenty-four hours still in office.

At his order the police round up all the crooks in town and take them to the cellar of Ping Ling or something, the suave Celestial friend of Ezekiel. There he gives them their choice. Will they confess their crimes or will they have their heads cut off by the strange oriental with the executioner's axe? The tough guys laugh. Then one of them is taken away. There are screams and soon he comes back lying on a plank, with his head on his chest. The second one is taken off and comes back the same way. By this time the audience is in on the gag, which consists of bumping the